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THE NIBELUNGEN SAGA AND THE GREAT IRISH EPIC

The long and intimate contact, during the ninth and tenth centuries, between the Irish and Norse settlers, in Ireland,¹ which furnished an easy means for the transmission of literature, has induced many scholars to point out specific elements of Norse literature that are borrowed from the Irish, or elements of the Irish that are borrowed from the Norse.² Prominent among these investigators was Professor Heinrich Zimmer, who tried to prove that the great Irish epic, the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, has been changed in many details as a result of the influence of the *Nibelungen* story.³ He has centered his attack especially on that most striking episode of the *Táin*, the combat at the ford between Cuchulainn and Ferdiad; and he maintains that the changes wrought under the Viking influence are of such a far-reaching nature that we can hardly form a clear picture of the original Irish story.⁴

¹ The intimacy of the contact between the Irish and the Norse during the Viking period is very generally admitted; but for the opinion that the contact was slight before the twelfth century, see W. Faraday, "On the Question of Irish Influence on Early Icelandic Literature," in *Memoirs of Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, Vol. XLIV (1899-1900), No. 2, p. 20.

² For discussions of Celtic borrowings see, for example, A. Bugge, "Havelok and Olaf Tryggvason," in *Saga-Book of the Viking Club*, VI (1909-10), 494, 495; S. Bugge, *The Home of the Eddic Poems* (trans. by W. H. Schofield, London, 1899), pp. 71-96; A. Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark* (trans. by L. M. Hollander, New York, 1919), p. 360.

For discussions of Norse borrowings see A. Bugge, *op. cit.*, pp. 294, 295; S. Bugge, *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 26, 28-66, 213, 214, 215, 268, 334, 352, 360 ff.; E. Hull, "Irish Episodes in Icelandic Literature," in *Saga-Book of the Viking Club*, III (1902-4), 235-70; A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-92, 411, 412, 420, 486, 490, 505; J. Stefánsson, "Western Influence on the Earliest Viking Settlers," in *Saga-Book of the Viking Club*, V (1907-8), 288-96.

³ See "Germanen, germanische Lehnwörter und germanische Sagen Elemente in der ältesten Überlieferung der irischen Heldensage," in *Zeit. f. d. Alterthum*, XXXII (1888), 289 ff. The section of this article that treats of the *Nibelungen* influence has been discussed in one or more of its aspects by A. Nutt (*Archaeological Review*, II [1888], 137-42); H. D'Arbois de Jubainville (*Revue Celt.*, IX [1888], 420-23); K. Meyer (*Revue Celt.*, X [1889], 360-69, and *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, II [1916], 562, 563); H. Lichtenberger (*Le Poème et la Légende des Nibelungen* [Paris, 1891], pp. 432-34); C. Andler (*Quid ad Fabulas Heroicas Germanorum Hiberni Contulerint* [Tours, 1897], pp. 77 ff.); E. Windisch (*Táin Bó Cúalnge* [Leipzig, 1905], p. 439); S. Friedmann (*Pubblicazioni della R. Accademia Scientifico Letteraria* [Milan, 1913], pp. 271 ff.).

⁴ "Hier haben offenkundig mächtige verschiebungen der alten irischen sage stattgefunden, verschiebungen so durchgreifender natur, dass wir kaum mehr im stande sein werden, uns ein völlig klares bild von diesen episoden des Tåinepos vor den einwirkung der germ. heldensage zu machen." Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

At the time when the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad episode begins,¹ Cuchulainn had for a long time been harassing the invading forces of Queen Medb, defeating her champions in single combat, and arresting the advance of her army into Ulster. Medb, vainly seeking for a warrior of sufficient prowess to overcome Cuchulainn, decides to employ Cuchulainn's comrade, Ferdiad, who is considered especially competent because of his *conganchness*, or "horny skin." Ferdiad is induced to undertake the combat against his friend only by means of deception, threats, and princely offers; but once his promise is given, his sense of honor holds him to the unwelcome task. The two champions meet, not as enemies, but as friends driven to fight through the cajolery of Queen Medb. Cuchulainn is honor bound to defend the ford against all comers, and Ferdiad feels that he must make good the pledge extorted from him. At the end of the first day, and again at the end of the second day of the conflict, the friends embrace and exchange gifts. Finally, on the fourth day of continuous fighting, Cuchulainn gives Ferdiad a mortal wound and then falls grief stricken at his side saying:

What avails me courage now ?
I'm oppressed with rage and grief,
For this deed that I have done
On this body sworded sore!²

In the long and passionate lament that follows Cuchulainn recalls his comradeship with Ferdiad and the blood-brotherhood that Scathach had made between them:

Then our famous nurse made fast
Our blood-pact of amity,
That our angers should not rise
'Mongst the tribes of noble Elg!

Sad the morn, a day in March,
Which struck down weak Daman's son.
Woe is me, the friend is fall'n
Whom I pledged in red blood's draught!³

¹ For text and German translation of the Book of Leinster version of the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad episode, the version Zimmer usually refers to in his discussion, see E. Windisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 434-599. A good English translation of the same version of the story is given by J. Dunn, *Táin Bó Cúalnge* (London, 1914), pp. 217-67.

² Translated by J. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

³ Translated by J. Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 266. The Irish text (E. Windisch, *op. cit.*, p. 591) is as follows:

Da naisc ar mummi go m-blad
ar cró cotaig is óentad,
cónna betis ar ferga
eter fíni fínd-Elga.

Truáig in maten maten máirt,
ros bí mac Damáin díthraicht,
uchan dochara in cara
dara daluis dig n-dergála.

Zimmer has not urged that this episode is a simple retelling of any part of the *Nibelungen* saga, a sector taken bodily out of the Germanic story; the great age of the Irish epic makes such a theory untenable, as Zimmer very readily admits.¹ What he does contend is that we can find in the episode certain striking features which prove that the original Irish story has been re-worked under the influence of the *Nibelungen* stories carried to Ireland by the Vikings. Five such features are emphasized:²

First, Ferdiad, like the German Siegfried,³ was provided with a horny skin. Second, the name *Ferdiad* means "man of mist" and is thus the Irish translation of Nibelung. Third, the whole tone of the episode is Germanic and altogether non-Irish. Fourth, the general situation in which Cuchulainn fights with four blood-brothers is a reflection of a similar situation in the *Nibelungen* saga.⁴ Fifth, Cuchulainn and Ferdiad are blood-brothers in the Germanic sense of the word; and blood-brotherhood was an institution unknown in Ireland until it was learned from the Norse invaders.

These five considerations taken together are, to say the least, striking. It is not surprising that such students of Scandinavian influence as Alexander Bugge,⁵ Eugene Mogk,⁶ and Wolfgang Golther⁷ have accepted Zimmer's view. For, according to Zimmer, we have

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 313, 314.

² See especially Zimmer, *ibid.*, pp. 291-313.

³ The German form of the name is (following Zimmer) used generally throughout this paper, though it is more probable, of course, that the Norse form, Sigurd, is nearer the form that would have been known in Ireland during the Viking period.

⁴ This feature does not appear in the summary given above, for it is not, as a matter of fact, sufficiently justified by the Irish story. See further discussion below.

⁵ See "Contributions to the History of the Norsemen in Ireland," Part II, pp. 17, 18, in *Videnskabselskabets Skrifter* (Christiania, 1900): "Professor Zimmer has proved that in the old Irish Sagas, there are traces of the old Scandinavian custom borrowed from the Vikings, of two men mingling their blood and becoming sworn brothers."

⁶ See "Kelten und Nordgermanen," in *Jahresbericht des städtischen Realgymnasiums zu Leipzig* (Leipzig, 1896), p. 24: "Aber nicht nur auf das praktische, auch auf das geistige Leben der Iren haben die Nordgermanen nicht unwesentlich eingewirkt. Nach Zimmers schönen Forschungen unterliegt dies keinem Zweifel mehr. In dem nordirischen Sagenkreise, der Heldensage von Ulster, erscheint als Gegner des Cuchulinn Fer Diad mac Domain, der mit Hornhaut versehen ist, der mit seinem Gegner einst Blutbrüderschaft getrunken hat, der, wie Siegfried von Hagens, durch Cuchulinn's Hand fällt, ein treues Bild unseres germanischen Lieblingshelden."

⁷ See "Die Wielandsage und die Wanderung der Fränkischen Heldensage," in *Germania*, XXXIII (1888), 476: "Für diesen Gang der Ereignisse spricht auch das Bekanntwerden der Sagen von den Nibelungen in Irland durch die Wikinger im 9. oder in der ersten Hälfte des 10. Jahrhunderts, welches von Zimmer nachgewiesen worden ist."

in the Irish story a hero whose very name is a translation of a name applied to Siegfried; who has, like Siegfried, a horny skin; and who has, again like Siegfried, sworn blood-brotherhood—a custom unknown among the early Irish—after the Scandinavian fashion with the man who is destined to kill him. And along with this array of evidence we have the assurance that the literary influence which we seem to see could readily have come through the intimate contact between the Irish and the Viking settlers.

But will Zimmer's various contentions bear analysis? It is the purpose of this paper to make a very hasty review of the first four contentions and to deal somewhat more fully with the fifth, which, on the face of it, is the weightiest of Zimmer's arguments.

As for the *conganchness*, or horny skin of Ferdiad, which Zimmer would equate with the invulnerable skin of Siegfried, we should remember that nowhere in the earliest Norse version of the *Nibelungen* story, that of the poetic *Edda*, is Siegfried represented as having a skin that could not be pierced by weapons. Nor does Siegfried have a horny skin either in the prose *Edda* or in the *Völ-sungasaga*. This feature does not appear in the Norse form of the *Nibelungen* story before the *Thidrekssaga*, which is generally recognized as a late Norwegian version of the thirteenth century, based on legends then current in north Germany.¹ It is, therefore, very probable that if the Irish of the ninth and tenth centuries heard any version of the Siegfried story, it was an earlier one in which the hero is not represented as having a horny skin.

But even if we grant that the Vikings in Ireland sang of an invulnerable Siegfried, it is not clear that we find a parallel in Ferdiad; for no less an authority than Professor Windisch holds that the *conganchness* was not an actual part of Ferdiad's body, but a kind of cuirass to be put on and off at will, and he cites passages from various manuscripts that would seem to establish his contention. He cites, for example, a passage in which Cuchulainn finds fault with Ferdiad for not showing him how his *conganchness* is closed and opened,² a

¹ For a summary of the opinions regarding the date and origin of the *Thidrekssaga*, see H. Bertleson, *Thidriks Saga af Bern* (Copenhagen, 1911), VI, liv-lvi. Zimmer recognizes (*op. cit.*, pp. 327 ff.) the lack of the horny skin in the early versions, but he argues that the Irish would have come in contact with the version represented by the *Thidrekssaga*.

² See Windisch, *op. cit.*, p. 439. S. Friedmann (*op. cit.*, pp. 275 ff.) argues that the idea of the horny skin is so widespread that we may perhaps think of it as Indo-European.

complaint that would have no point if the horny skin were, like Siegfried's, a part of the body. Further proof of the armor-like nature of the *conganchness* is in the fact that Ferdiad is wounded over the edge of it:

Cuchulinn ergriff den Kurtzspeer, er schleuderte ihn von seiner Handfläche über den Rand des Schildes und über die Halsöffnung der Hornhaut, so dass die jenseitige Hälfte von ihm sichtbar wurde, nach Durchbohrung seines Herzens in seiner Brust.¹

The second contention, regarding the name *Ferdiad*, is also open to question. This name, which Zimmer regards as an Irish rendering of *Nibelung*, is a compound of the two words *fer*, meaning "man," and *dio*, genitive *diad*, which Zimmer translates "mist."² But Windisch maintains that *dio* means "smoke," and that *Ferdiad* is to be translated "man of smoke" rather than "man of mist."³ There is, however, in one of the sixteen or more manuscripts of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* a reading, *Ferdiad nél ndatha*, which would seem to be favorable to Zimmer's view regarding the influence of the word *Nibelung*. It remained for Professor Kuno Meyer to show, in a special article on this passage, that on account of well-established metrical laws the reading *nél*, "cloud," must be considered an error on the part of the scribe of the one manuscript that gives it. Other manuscripts give a slightly different reading here, *ndeilimm datha*, which answers all metrical requirements and must be translated "shapely rod," an epithet frequently applied to warriors.⁴ Thus it

¹ Translated by E. Windisch, *op. cit.*, p. 562. The Irish text, as given by Windisch (p. 563) is as follows: "Boruairid Cuchulaind in certgæ, delgthi do lár a dernainni dar bîl in sceith 7 dar brollach in chonganchnis, gor bo rœen in leth n-alltarach de ar tregtad a chride na chiab." Zimmer argues (*op. cit.*, pp. 295-301) that this incident is a late addition made by a story-teller who has in mind the Siegfried story. But in that case, why does not the narrator make the *conganchness* an actual part of the body instead of implying that it was merely a part of the armor extending up to a certain point?

² See *op. cit.*, pp. 301-3. Zimmer argued that the inflection of both parts of the name *Ferdiad* showed it to be a nickname rather than a real name; but Friedmann (*op. cit.*, pp. 282, 283) has pointed out Irish real names in which the first element is inflected as well as the last.

³ See *op. cit.*, p. 439.

⁴ See "Ferdiaid the Nibelung," in *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature*, II (1916), 562, 563.

H. Lichtenberger (*op. cit.*, p. 434) gives two further reasons why there could have been no influence of *Siegfried the Nibelung* on *Ferdiad*. In the first place, "Siegfrid n'est jamais dans aucun texte appelé Nibelunc; il serait donc bien étrange qu'il eût été connu sous ce nom en Irlande"; and secondly, "au viii^e siècle, époque à laquelle la légende doit avoir été importée en Irlande, nous savons que, sur territoire franc du moins, le nom de *Nibelunc* avait perdu sa signification étymologique de: *homme ou fils des ténèbres*; nous avons donc le droit de nous étonner que les Irlandais aient compris et traduit un mot qui, dans la bouche des Germains, n'était probablement plus qu'un nom propre."

is evident that we have no sufficient grounds for believing that the name *Ferdiad* is an attempt on the part of the Irish story-tellers to translate *Nibelung*.

The contention in regard to the tone¹ of the Irish story is a matter of taste on which we can expect no absolute agreement. But certainly the vast majority of Celtic students will not agree that the spirit of the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad episode is unknown elsewhere in Irish literature. A similar instance, both in tone and situation, appears in *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne*,² when the old friends of Dermot are taken by their leader, Finn, against him, they all the time advising Finn against the expedition and aiding Dermot secretly. Or we may compare with the *Táin* episode the *Aided Énfir Áifi*,³ in which Cuchulainn is brought into combat with his heroic son; or the whole situation in which Fergus finds himself in the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* when he, an Ulster exile, accompanies Medb on the invasion of Ulster. And as for the pathos of the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad episode, it hardly surpasses that of *Longes mac nUsnig*,⁴ the Deirdre story.

The comparison between the general situations in the Irish and the Germanic stories is probably the weakest part of Zimmer's argument, for to any reader the differences must appear much more striking than the similarities. The best parallel is that between Cuchulainn's opposition to several blood-brothers and Siegfried's opposition to several blood-brothers; but this parallel is of no real service to Zimmer, since he has equated Cuchulainn, not with Siegfried, but with Hagen.⁵ And besides, Cuchulainn fights with *more* than four men at the ford, and of those men we have proof that only two, Ferdiad and Ferbaeth, were actually blood-brothers of Cuchulainn. As for the comparison between Cuchulainn killing Ferdiad and Hagen killing Siegfried, the objection is to be raised

¹ Zimmer cites several incidents from Germanic literature and then concludes (*op. cit.*, p. 304): "Ist hierin nicht echt germanisches heldenleben abgespiegelt? was hat die irische heldensage dem an die seite zu setzen? nichts; ein anderer geist weht aus ihr."

² A translation is given by P. W. Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, London, 1879.

³ Edited and translated in *Eriu*, I (1904), 113-21.

⁴ A translation is given by A. H. Leahy, *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, I (London, 1905), 91-109.

⁵ A. Nutt (*op. cit.*, pp. 137-42) notes this inconsistency in Zimmer's argument and points out the improbability that the Irish would have equated their greatest hero, the victorious Cuchulainn, with the villain Hagen.

that in the earliest version of the Norse Nibelung story—the version that the Irish would have known, if any—Siegfried is not killed by Hagen.

This hasty survey of Zimmer's first four contentions is, perhaps, sufficient to show that they are all open to serious question and give but little support to his hypothesis. But the fifth and most important contention, which has met with considerable favor,¹ is enough within itself, if established, to give much weight to the hypothesis. If it is true that blood-brotherhood was a custom unknown among the early Irish and that the blood-brotherhood mentioned in the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad episode is of the Scandinavian type, then we should have to admit some general Scandinavian influence, if not a specific Nibelungen influence.

We may first inquire into the correctness of Zimmer's view that the Irish knew nothing of blood-brotherhood until they learned it from the Vikings. It is now a well-established fact that covenanting by some use of the blood of the covenanters, the custom known as blood-brotherhood, has been practiced in nearly all parts of the world. Scores of examples are recorded,² showing that blood-brotherhood has been known throughout the centuries, from hundreds of years before Christ among the early Scythians³ down to our own day among savage tribes.⁴ And the practice is found in such widely scattered regions as America,⁵ Australia,⁶ Africa,⁷ Europe,⁸

¹ See A. Bugge (*op. cit.*, p. 17); E. Mogk (*op. cit.*, p. 24); W. Golther (*op. cit.*, XXXIII [1888], 476); and H. Lichtenberger (*op. cit.*, p. 433). Even such Celtists as A. Nutt (*loc. cit.*) and H. Gaidoz (*Mélusine*, IX [1899], 235) have touched upon Zimmer's discussion of blood-brotherhood without recording a dissenting opinion.

² See J. P. Hamilton-Grierson, "Brotherhood (Artificial)," *Enc. of Religion and Ethics*, II (1910), 857-71; M. Pappenheim, *Die Altdänischen Schutzgilden*, Breslau, 1885; H. C. Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, London, 1887; S. Ciszewski, *Künstliche Verwandtschaft bei den Südslaven*, Cracovie, 1897.

³ See Lucian, *Toxaris*, chap. xxxvii; Herodotus, *Historiae*, IV, chap. lxx; for other early examples of blood-brotherhood mentioned by Herodotus, see *Historiae*, I, chap. lxxiv; III, chaps. vii, viii.

⁴ See V. L. Cameron, *Across Africa* (New York, 1877), p. 233; B. Spencer and W. Gillen, *Northern Tribes of Central Australia* (New York, 1904), pp. 372, 560, 562, 598.

⁵ See H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States of North America*, I (New York, 1874), 636, 637; F. Fletcher, *World Encompassed by Sir Francis Drake* (Hackluyt Society, London, 1854), p. 54.

⁶ See B. Spencer and S. Gillen, *op. cit.*; B. Spencer and S. Gillen, *Native Tribes of Central Australia* (New York, 1899), pp. 461, 462.

⁷ See H. M. Stanley, *The Congo*, II (London, 1885), 23, 24, 104, 105; D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (New York, 1889), pp. 525, 526.

⁸ See F. S. Krauss, in *Am Ur-Quell*, Neue Folge, I (1890), 194-96; P. B. Du Challu, *Viking Age*, II (New York, 1899), 61.

and Asia.¹ Since the early Celts were unquestionably in a cultural state at which blood-brotherhood would have flourished, it is only reasonable to suppose that they, as well as their neighbors, were acquainted with the custom. And furthermore, the wide distribution of the Celtic tribes throughout middle Europe in historical or semi-historical times gave them an unusually good opportunity to learn of blood-brotherhood before the period of their migration to the British Islands—if, indeed, we can suppose that they were not already acquainted with the custom at that early period.

But we do not need to rely merely on probabilities, for there is abundant evidence that the Irish practiced blood-brotherhood. The Welsh historian, Giraldus Cambrensis, writing not later than two years after his visit to Ireland in 1185, not only describes the custom as he knew it, but also records the tradition that it was practiced by the Irish in heathen times.² And Martin, a native of the Hebrides who traveled extensively among the Celtic islands off the western coast of Scotland during the latter part of the seventeenth century, reports (apparently on the authority of local tradition) how the ancient islanders had ratified their leagues of friendship "by drinking a drop of each other's blood."³ But, after all, the real evidence for the Celtic custom is found in early Irish literature, which preserves at least eight separate and distinct examples of blood-brotherhood.⁴

¹ See A. Featherman, *Social History of the Races of Mankind*, II (London, 1881-91), 264; D. M. Smeaton, *Loyal Karens of Burma* (London, 1887), pp. 168, 169; Herodotus, *loc. cit.*

² Giraldus Cambrensis, *Topographia Hibernica* (ed. by J. F. Dimnock, "Rolls Series," London, 1867), distinctio III, caput XXII.

³ M. Martin, *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1884), p. 109.

⁴ For these eight examples see:

Bóroma, ed. and tr. by W. Stokes, *Revue Celt.*, XIII (1892), 72-77.

Táin Bó Cúalnge, ed. and tr. by E. Windisch (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 434-599; see also J. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-67.

Táin Bó Cúalnge, ed. and tr. by E. Windisch (Leipzig, 1905), pp. 290-97; see also J. Dunn, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-54.

Tochmarc Emire, ed. by K. Meyer, *Zeit. f. celt. Phil.*, III (1901), 259; tr. by K. Meyer in E. Hull, *Cuchullin Saga* (London, 1898), pp. 81-82. The same blood-brotherhood is also recorded in *Aided Lugdach occus Derbforgaile*, ed. and tr. by C. Marstarnder, *Eriu*, V (1911), 208, 214.

Aided Muirchertaig maic Erca, ed. and tr. by W. Stokes, *Revue Celt.*, XXIII (1902), 405-7. Stokes omits a poem of seven stanzas that throws much light on the blood-covenant. This poem has, however, been edited and translated from the *Yellow Book of*

And since half of these examples are found in the oldest manuscripts, well imbedded in stories of genuine Irish flavor, that seem to antedate the Viking age, it is possible to make the borrowing theory at all convincing only by the clearest evidence for transmission, especially in view of what we know of the world-wide distribution of the blood-covenant.

Professor Zimmer was, apparently, acquainted with only three examples of Irish blood-brotherhood—two from the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* and one from the *Bóroma*; and in order to support his theory that the Irish did not know the custom before the Viking period, he felt it necessary to explain the covenant in the *Bóroma* as a borrowing. To do this he merely shows that the text in the form preserved belongs to the eleventh or twelfth centuries and contains two Norse loan words.¹ No one denies the lateness of the text, and we have no sufficient evidence for the age of the story itself, which is connected

Lecan facsimile in an unpublished Harvard dissertation by the present writer, *Blood Brotherhood among the Celts* (Cambridge, 1918), pp. 70, 71.

Colamcille cecinit dia tudaic Corbmac cuicce as a tir, ed. and tr. by E. Curry, in W. Reeves, *Life of St. Columba* (Dublin, 1857), pp. 270–75.

Annals of Ulster, ed. and tr. by W. M. Hennessy, II (Dublin, 1893, 1895, 1901), 354–57. The same incident is recorded in the *Annals of Loch Cé*, ed. and tr. by W. M. Hennessy, I (London, 1871), 480, 481.

Togail Troi, ed. and tr. by W. Stokes, *Irische Texte*, ser. 2, heft 1 (Leipzig, 1884), pp. 19, 83, 84. The *Togail Troi* is a retelling of “Dares Phrygius” (see F. Meister, *Daretis Phrygii de Excidio Troiae Historia* [Lipsiae, 1873], p. 13). Since the blood-covenant is an addition made by the Irish writer to his source, it has fully as much value, as evidence for the custom of blood-brotherhood among the Irish, as a blood-covenant recorded in native Irish story.

¹ See Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 308. The *Bóroma* is the story of the collecting of a famous tribute, *bóroma*, which was levied somewhat irregularly between the second and eleventh centuries. Zimmer makes a valuable suggestion in speculating on the original extent of the *Bóroma*, which, in the text he knew, breaks off at a gap in the manuscript with the Irish king who died in 693. It is, of course, probable that the blood-covenant incident was written at the time of the whole story, and thus not until after the year which marks the final limit of the narrative. But, on the other hand, if the narrative ends before the date of the last attempt to levy the *bóroma*, it is probable that the whole story, including the blood-covenant, was written shortly after the date marking the end. The date of the end has fortunately been discovered by W. Stokes (*Revue Celt.*, XIII [1892], 32, 116, 117) who edited the *Bóroma* five years after Zimmer's work and found, by comparing the defective *Book of Leinster* text with a text preserved in the *Book of Lecan*, that the narrative continues for only one leaf beyond the break in the *Book of Leinster*, and carries the history of the *bóroma* only to the last of the seventh century, not to the beginning of the eleventh. And, what is more, the story ends with the remark: “Conad he F. forcenn na Boroma” (So that is the end of the *Boroma*). It is difficult to understand why the writer should have made this remark on ending his story with the incidents of the seventh century (unless it is merely the conventional ending), or why he should have continued his narrative no further, unless he was actually writing the story at the beginning of the eighth century.

with Aed, the Irish high king who died in 594; but it is manifestly unscientific to hold that the presence of two Norse loan words, which have no vital connection with the blood-covenant and could easily have been inserted during transcriptions of the manuscript, *proves* that the blood-covenant described in the story was borrowed. It is still more difficult to believe that the covenants of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* are borrowed, for it is universally conceded that the *Táin* gives us a picture of very early Irish life. Recent archaeological investigation has tended to substantiate the tradition that the *Táin* took shape at about the beginning of the Christian Era.¹ But the original shaping of the material and the casting of it into a definite written form are entirely different matters. The latter problem has been carefully examined by Zimmer,² who concludes that as early as the seventh century (long before the Viking period in Ireland) the *Táin* was written down in practically the form in which it is preserved in the twelfth-century manuscripts. In the transmission of the texts there was, no doubt, opportunity for minor changes to creep in. But *minor changes* could never have transformed an episode containing no blood-brotherhood into the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad story, for the covenant between the two men is the very backbone of the narrative. It is therefore only reasonable to conclude that the blood-brotherhood bond must in all probability have existed in some form in the *Táin* version of the eighth century, before the time of the Viking settlements. But even though the presence in Irish literature of the three covenants known to Zimmer could be explained, there would still remain the five that he did not know, each of which would need to be accounted for by the exponent of the borrowing hypothesis.

We cannot, on the basis of evidence thus far considered, deny the *possibility* that the early Irish learned the practice of covenanting by blood from the Vikings; but we may, fortunately, go a step farther by making a comparison of Norse and Irish methods of covenanting. If Irish blood-brotherhood is of Norse origin, if it is, as Zimmer says, a blood-brotherhood "im germanischen sinne des wortes,"³ then it should bear a marked resemblance to the type

¹ See W. Ridgeway, "The Date of the First Shaping of the Cuchulainn Saga," *Proc. British Academy*, II (1905-6), 135-68.

² See *Zeit. f. vergleich. Sprachforschung*, XXVIII (1887), 426 ff.; *Zeit. f. d. Alterthum*, XXXII (1888), 234, 314.

³ See Zimmer, *Zeit. f. d. Alterthum*, XXXII (1888), 305. C. Andler, (*op. cit.*, pp. 80-83) notes the difference in type between the *Bóroma* blood-covenant and the Scandinavian covenants.

employed by the Vikings. The Norse practice is made clear by a number of examples. All our evidence shows that it was somewhat peculiar in that the blood was never used as a drink, but merely allowed to mingle, either in a footprint or in loose earth under a strip of turf; whereas over the world generally the blood was most frequently drunk by the participants. The Norse custom also laid unusual stress on the obligation of the one brother to revenge the death of the other. All of these features of the Norse custom appear in the history of Saxo Grammaticus (twelfth to thirteenth century), who mentions the mingling of blood in a footprint and speaks of it as a practice of the ancients.¹ Saxo's testimony is well supported by examples from the poems of the *Elder Edda*, which date back, in part at least, to the Viking age, and should thus preserve the very form of blood-brotherhood that the Norse would have used in Ireland. In one of the Eddic poems, the *Loka-Senna*, we find Loki reproaching Woden for lack of hospitality, citing the time when they had mingled their blood together.² And in another Eddic poem, *Brot af Sigorðarkviðo*, appears a blood-covenant of unusual interest, since it is between Sigurd (the German Siegfried) and Gunnar, two of the characters from the *Nibelungen* saga whom Zimmer takes as models for two of the Irish blood-brothers of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge* episode we have under consideration. Moreover, the date of the *Brot* is placed about the year 1000,³ just at the time when, according to Zimmer's hypothesis, the *Nibelungen* elements were entering the Irish epic.⁴ If the Irish had borrowed blood-brotherhood along with other elements from the *Nibelungen* saga, they would, in all probability, have used the form of covenant described in the *Brot* as having existed between Sigurd and Gunnar. This covenant was the typical Norse⁵ one in which participants mingled their blood in a footprint, as is made clear by Brynhild's

¹ See *Gesta Danorum*, ed. by A. Holder, I (Strassburg, 1886), 23.

² See B. Stijmons and H. Gering, *Die Lieder der Edda* (Halle, 1906), p. 126:
 "Mant[u] þat, Óþenn, es vit í árdaga
 blendum blóði saman?"

³ See F. Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske Litteraturs Historie*, I (Copenhagen, 1894-1902), 285.

⁴ See *Zeit. f. d. Alterthum*, XXXII (1888), 330.

⁵ By *typical Norse*, as it is used here and below, is meant the well-known Norse type that has been preserved in a considerable number of examples. It is possible, of course, that other forms of covenanting by blood were known to the Vikings, and have not been recorded.

reproof of Gunnar: "Ill, Gunnar! didst thou remember when blood ye in your footsteps both let flow."¹

When we turn from this typical Norse blood-covenant formed by Sigurd and Gunnar to the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad covenant, we find not a notable similarity in method, but a striking difference, for the bond had been formed in the latter instance by the *drinking* of blood:

Woe is me, the friend is fall'n
Whom I pledged in red blood's draught.

That blood-drinking was a significant part of the Irish ceremony we know also from the example found in the *Bóroma* and from the testimony of Giraldus Cambrensis and Martin. All the evidence I have been able to secure concerning Irish blood-brotherhood shows that the Irish never allowed the blood to mingle, either in a footprint or in loose earth after the Norse fashion. Nor is there in the Celtic the least trace of the revenge motif so commonly stressed in the Norse. The Celtic methods of forming blood-covenants are very closely paralleled by those found in widely scattered parts of the world, but are notably different from the methods employed among the Norse of the Viking period. The conclusion forced upon us is that, whatever the source of Irish blood-brotherhood may be—if we must look for a source—there is no evidence to show that it was borrowed from the Norse.

Since Zimmer's strongest argument is untenable, and since each of his other arguments is open to grave objections, we are justified in rejecting his hypothesis that the Cuchulainn-Ferdiad episode was re-worked under the influence of the *Nibelungen* saga.

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¹ See B. Thorpe, *The Edda* (London, 1866), p. 87. The text (ed. by B. Sijmons and H. Gering, *op. cit.*, p. 356) is as follows:

"Mantat, Gunnarr, til gǫrva þat,
es blópe í spor báþer rendöþ."

The Norse method of mingling blood in loose earth while the participants passed under a strip of loose turf is described in *Gísla saga Súrssonar* (ed. by F. Jónsson, *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek*, X [1903], 13, 14) and in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, kap. XXI (ed. by V. Asmundarson, *Fornaldarsögur Nordlanda*, Reykjavík, 1885, II). For discussions of Norse blood-brotherhood, see the general references already given and in addition: F. B. Gummere, *Germanic Origins* (New York, 1892), p. 173; Jakob Grimm, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, I (Leipzig, 1848), 136, 137; and *Deutsche Rechtsalterthümer*, I (Leipzig, 1899), 266.